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ABSTRACT

The different perceptions of literacy that inform the work of various groups working with disadvantaged groups within society were explored in a case study in which individuals providing services to low-skilled, disadvantaged clients in an outer urban area of Brisbane, Australia, were interviewed regarding their perceptions of their clients' literacy needs. The study informants included representatives of community-based organizations, including program administrators, welfare officers, community health workers, counselors, voluntary workers, and members of the wider community. The findings of the Survey of Aspects of Literacy (SAL) were also reviewed to gain insight into the area's population demographics and area residents' levels of prose, document, and quantitative literacy. The study identified a series of networks in service provision to the local community that were conscious of the implication of lower literacy skills in a plethora of clients' problems. However, the networks were found to be working under difficult circumstances caused by poorly coordinated resourcing cycles and competition for limited funding. Locally led and managed literacy programs appeared to have the best client attendance and overall endorsement of the community. (The bibliography lists 41 references. The following items are appended: population demographics of the study area; findings of the SAL; and a generic list of informants to the project.) (MN)

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Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium

ALNARC

Multiple Literacies and Social Transformation

A case study of perceptions of literacy needs and social transformation by service providers of low skilled disadvantaged clients in an outer urban area of Brisbane

Geraldine Castleton and Marya McDonald

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1 Background

This project builds on previous research undertaken by the Queensland Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (Searle, 1999) as well as on contemporary research in the areas of social capital (Edwards & Foley, 1997; Falk, 2000; Falk & Fitzpatrick, 2000; Walter, 1999; Woolcock, 1998) and lifelong learning (Bentley, 1998; Candy, 1991, 1993; Candy & Crebert, 1997; Kearns, 1999) to explore new ways of understanding and responding to the literacy needs of particular individuals and groups in our society. Its interest is in exploring the relationship between literacy and local, national and international need for individuals and communities to be adaptable, responsive to change, and proactive and confident in planning for their futures.

2 Understandings of literacy

In the first instance, this project takes up those understandings of literacy that extend beyond simplistic notions of literacy as skill to recognise it as social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995), therefore taking on various forms and purposes for individuals and for society. Such a conceptualisation de-emphasises a focus on individual skill that locates literacy within a human capital model and, accordingly, allows individuals to be characterised as 'deficient'. Rather, it focuses more positively on the many different ways in which people individually and collectively *use* literacy in their everyday lives. Recent research conducted within and across a range of contexts including community and workplaces (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Castleton, 2000; Hull, 1997: Prinsloo & Breier, 1996; Searle, 1999) demonstrates the various ways in which people operate within diverse 'communities of practice' that are characterised by a mutual exchange of skills and practices, including literacy.

Social uses of literacy, or what Breier and Sait (1996: 79) refer to as "strategies of reciprocity", rarely are acknowledged in official discourses that often give sole emphasis to literacy as autonomous, individualised skill, thereby allowing certain people to be defined as 'deficient'. Examination of particular communities of practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Castleton et al., 1999; Hamilton, 2000) has shown the existence of various literacy practices with Barton and Hamilton (1998: 247) making a distinction between these practices along the lines of 'vernacular' and 'institutional' literacies. Vernacular literacies are defined as

> *essentially ones which are not regulated by the formal rules and procedures of dominant social institutions and which have their origins in everyday life ... in fact hybrid practices which draw on a range of practices from different domains.*
>
> (Barton & Hamilton, 1998:247)

In seeking to define 'institutional' or dominant literacy practices or discourses, Barton and Hamilton (1998: 252) see these practices as

> *associated with formal organisations... more formalised than vernacular practices and given high value, legally and culturally.... more standardised and defined in terms of the formal purposes of the institution, rather than in terms of the multiple and shifting purposes of the individual citizens and their community.*

Barton and Hamilton (1998: 10) further elaborate the difference between the multiplicity of vernacular literacies and the formal discourses of institutional literacy in the following terms:

> *Socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices. These dominant practices can be seen as part of whole discourse formations, institutionalised configurations of power and knowledge which are embodied in social relationships. Other vernacular literacies which exist in people's everyday lives are less visible and less supported. This means that literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others.*

The distinction that Barton and Hamilton make between 'vernacular' and 'institutional' literacy can be likened to Gee's (1990) description of "primary" and "secondary" Discourses. Gee defines "secondary Discourses" as patterns and ways of being taken up by official groups, such as government bureaucracies, churches, professional bodies and authority groups. These official and powerful ways of talking and writing in and about the world become privileged and valued over the "primary Discourses" in which people are socialised, such as the home, family and cultural groups. In these terms, Barton and Hamilton's 'vernacular' literacy can be seen to reflect Gee's "primary Discourse", while 'institutional' literacy resembles "secondary Discourse".

The important point to make about 'vernacular' literacies is that they have their origins and purposes in people's everyday lives and in their communities. Furthermore, we know that 'vernacular' literate practices are purposeful, used to organise people's personal and public lives, are learned informally, and are a tool of social participation and, by natural extension, a tool of community development. Within contexts of use, or 'communities of practice', people move in and out of the roles of 'novice' and 'expert', sometimes being the individual requiring assistance, while on other occasions being the person who provides assistance (Hamilton, 2000). Hull (1997) has identified a person who might provide literacy support in such contexts or networks as a "literacy broker", often applying their literacy skills on behalf of others in return for different services that can be provided by other community members. These brokers both mentor and require mentoring themselves so that the community receives current and reliable literacy skills, useable in community contexts.

A broader conceptualisation of literacy as "the social processes which connect people with one another and ... include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998: 6-7) enables a logical, conceptual and practical link to be made with social capital, defined by Woolcock (1998: 1285) as "encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit". Social capital, like notions of literacy as social practice, recognises "networks, norms, relationships of trust and the resultant social cohesion involve[d] in formal and informal associations" (Falk, 2000: 50). According to Falk (2000), social capital is an essential ingredient for effective social interaction, thereby highlighting its involvement in proactive community development.

The linking of literacy and social capital also allows a focus on lifelong learning, particularly as it is displayed in the informal contexts where 'vernacular' literacies are located. It can be argued that any form of literacy support provided to individuals and groups will leave recipients with opportunities for further learning, either formal or informal, individual or collective. As the authors of a recent Australian National Training Authority commissioned report on Lifelong Learning (ANTA, 1999: 40) note, "lifelong learning happens in, and links together, three distinct aspects of life — individual competence and capacity, economic resilience and social inclusion". Though this report appears to privilege individual over collective competence, the emphasis on social inclusion clearly deals with issues more related to community development and social capital as corollaries of lifelong learning than just a mere focus on individual skills.

The three aspects of lifelong learning identified in the ANTA report are frequently linked in literature about literacy, particularly for adults, and literature about social capital. Current debates around lifelong learning recognise that learning may not necessarily be just work and career related, but may be personally and community oriented. Bringing together work on literacy, social capital and lifelong learning enables us to think of literacy and literacy provision as an issue broader than a focus on equitable distribution of 'access'. Building on the work of Street (1996), who argues for greater recognition of literacy as an agent of 'change', enabling people to achieve personal and societal goals, this tripartite concern for linking literacy, social capital and lifelong learning takes up Street's (1996: 2-3) call for researchers to "suspend judgement as to what constitutes literacy among the people they are working with until they are able to understand what it means to the people themselves,

and from which social contexts reading and writing derive their meaning". Similarly, research reported by Castleton and colleagues (1999) argues for more emphasis to be given to literacy as social change as an alternative position to the predominant view of literacy provision only as an access issue. Further, this conceptualisation allows a role for literacy in "social transformation, through broadening the intersections among various welfare agencies and literacy providers" (Searle, 1999: 4). The themes of literacy as social practice, able to be identified as either 'vernacular' or 'institutional', of social capital and of lifelong learning will therefore inform each stage of this current project.

3 Description of the project

With these interests in mind, the specific aims of the project were to identify the different perceptions of literacy that inform the work of various groups that work with disadvantaged groups within society; and to determine the implications of these different perceptions for adult literacy policy and practice and for community development.
These aims were to be reached through achieving the following objectives:

- developing a demographic map of the local area selected for the project, and its community-based organisations;
- establishing working relationships between Queensland ALNARC and various community-based groups for the purposes of effective dialogue and meeting mutual goals;
- gaining an enhanced understanding of the relationship between literacy and other factors that impact on the lives of particular people within the community, including lack of employment, low socio-economic status, poor educational standards, homelessness and poor health;
- identifying the resources currently used by people who have low literacy skills (as individuals and as members of a group/s) in conjunction with the factors mentioned above;
- determining, in collaboration with the various agencies involved, the most effective means of improving people's literacy skills while enhancing their quality of life outcomes (individual and collective)
- making recommendations to the relevant authorities on the appropriate resourcing of community-based groups for literacy provision or support.

As well as exploring different perspectives on the role of literacy in the everyday lives of clients of community-based organisations, or "how literacy activities are supported, sustained, learned and impeded in people's lives and relationships, and the social meaning they have" (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 11), the project also had an interest in examining the day-to-day structures and outcomes of social interactions between members of such organisations and their clients, many of whom may have limited literacy skills. Its interest is in the role of literacy in these interactions and the potential of outcomes of these interactions to act as agents of change in communities and societies, thereby having the capacity to build and use social capital.

Put simply, the project aimed to bring together various groups of people within a specific geographical area who share a common concern for those members of society who are most vulnerable and frequently excluded from benefits that mainstream society takes for granted. It intended to explore at a local level the capacity of productive relationships among different community-based groups that work with people typically defined in adult literacy and social welfare discourses as "disadvantaged". Equally significant was the concern to devise effective ways of ensuring these people can achieve personal competence, economic resilience and social inclusion (ANTA, 1999: 38).

4 Research design

The project adopted a case study approach, employing qualitative discourse analytic procedures. According to Knobel (1999: 7), case study involves "delimiting the object of study (i.e., the case) so that it becomes both an integrated and a (provisionally) bounded system. A case can take many forms, including an event, a person, process, institution or social grouping, with each case then being examined in its 'real life context', drawing on multiple sources of evidence. Case studies provide the opportunity to explore and interpret complex interrelationships among components or participants" (Knobel, 1999: 8). In this instance, a specific geographical area, and the various community groups located within it, becomes the case of study.

5 Methodology

The project, undertaken in three stages, took up an approach to discourse analysis that focuses on both written and spoken texts (Miller, 1997; Prior, 1997; Silverman 1993). The first stage involved the collection and initial analysis of statistical and demographic data collected during the 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census as well as more recent population and labour market statistics accessed through federal and state politicians and the local council.

This data was instrumental in verifying the selection of what will be known throughout as Selfhelp City as a suitable site for study, as well as providing a comprehensive cameo of the area. The analysis of this data assisted in the selection of community-based organisations to participate in the next stage of the project. Interviews with key stakeholders, including a local representative of a relevant state government department, also assisted in this process.

A range of relevant print-based texts was collected at this stage for analysis. Data took the form of print materials (e.g. demographic statistical material, minutes, brochures, flyers) collected from local authorities, statutory bodies and community-based groups involved in the study, as well as interviews and focus-group sessions with key informants within these organisations and the wider community.

The second stage of the project involved interviews with representatives from a range of community-based groups as well as a selection of their clients. Key informants were politicians and policy makers as well as program administrators and workers within community organisations and literacy programs, together with clients who accessed community services or programs. Interviews and focus-groups were taped and transcribed using recognised transcription conventions. A generic list of informants is attached as Appendix C.

The final stage involved an in-depth analysis of interview and focus-group data, using analytic techniques from applied ethnomethodology (Membership Categorisation Analysis). The data was first systematically analysed to identify key issues and emerging themes. Next ethnomethodologic interpretive procedures were used with interview and focus-group data to allow the various ways in which people with poor literacy skills are categorised and characterised to be made explicit (Garfinkel, 1967, 1974; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Sacks, 1972). Attention was given not only to what is documented and said in the data, but also to the silences and gaps that exist in the various accounts that are

given. The consequences of the (mis)matches identified for policy and practice around people with limited literacy were examined. The findings of this step were then checked against the entire interview data to determine if their salience was consistent across the information.

Participants

The participants of the study included representatives from community-based organisations, such as program administrators, welfare officers, community health workers, counsellors, voluntary workers and members of the wider community, for example participants in inter-agency networks, selected to give a range of views on the topic under investigation (18 individuals). Clients of two community-based organisations were invited to participate in the project (21 people).

All participants received a written invitation to participate in the study and, at that time, its purposes were outlined in detail. Each participant or representative signed a consent form that was, where necessary, read to participants by the Queensland Centre ALNARC Research Officer.

It was agreed that the names of participants and the organisations where they are employed, work as volunteers or are clients, would be masked in all publications relating to this study. This information was included in the letters of invitation to participate in the study and in the consent forms. Assurances were also sought from the management of the participating organisations that the involvement of the organisations' employees and volunteers would not jeopardise their employment or status with that organisation. This assurance was made explicit to the workers by the Queensland Centre ALNARC Research Officer. Appendix C, which is a list describing the types of source organisations for interviewees, is therefore not specific.

Feedback

All participants were offered a summary of the outcomes of the project. In the case of those people with limited literacy skills, this took a slightly different form from that offered to the other participants. It was built into the design of the project that there be some dissemination of outcomes in collaboration with those organisations involved (e.g. presentation of outcomes at an inter-agency network meeting, or a community forum).

6 Discussion

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Aspects of Literacy (SAL, 1997) was obtained and analysed alongside population statistics for the Selfhelp City area of the federal electorate of R*****, also for the same period. The findings were augmented by an analysis of the text material on the current city's profile, supplied by the Selfhelp City Council. Finally, an analysis of the minutes of the full inter-agency meeting of August 2000, and brochures from several of the community services targeted for interview confirmed the suitability of Selfhelp as the research site.

Findings of the Adult Literacy Survey (1997)

The Survey of Aspects of Literacy (SAL) was undertaken between May and July of Census year 1996 as a national survey of people aged 15-74 years of age, designed to measure some elements of Australians' literacy and numeracy skills. These skills were the information processing skills necessary to use printed material found at work, at home and in the community. Those elements which most closely reflect the population demographics of the case study area are quoted in this section, however a full analysis of the SAL is to be found in **Appendix B**. Disadvantaged groups can be aligned against the direct context of the population demographics and characteristics of the residents of Selfhelp City. Likewise, in reverse, their projected likely skills profile can be compared with the characteristics of the SAL.

The SAL objectively measured three types of literacy:

Prose literacy	Prose literacy is the ability to understand and use information from various kinds of prose texts, including newspapers, magazines and brochures. The skills required included locating information in texts, integrating two or more pieces of information and generating information by processing information from the text or by making text-based inferences.
Document literacy	Document literacy is the ability to locate and use information contained in materials such as tables, schedules, charts, graphs and maps. The effective use of documents depends partly on being able to

	locate information in a variety of displays, taking various conditions into account, to integrate information from various parts of the document, to generate information by processing information or by making inferences, and to transfer information from one source to another.
Quantitative literacy	Quantitative literacy is the ability to perform arithmetic operations using numbers contained in printed texts or documents. The effective use of numbers contained in printed material involves being able to locate numbers and extract them from material that may contain similar but irrelevant information, and being able to perform arithmetic operations when the operations to be used must often be inferred. This type of literacy has a strong element of numeracy. However, because quantitative literacy relates to the ability to extract and use numbers from printed texts and documents, it is referred to as a type of literacy.

Individuals undertaking the survey were asked to complete formal tasks for a standardised assessment, but also to self-assess on their perceptions of their proficiency with the literacy/numeracy tasks. The general findings of the levels of skills as a result of the SAL help to answer the questions of whether Australians' literacy skills are adequate for the challenges placed upon them in daily life, and whether there are any groups in the community which may be disadvantaged by poor literacy skills.

Skill levels

The SAL did not define literacy in terms of a basic threshold, above or below which a person was either literate or not literate. Rather it defined literacy as a continuum for each of the three types of literacy denoting how well people used material printed in English. Progression along this continuum was characterised by increased ability to process information and to draw correct inferences based on the material being used. For analytical purposes, the score on the literacy continuum for each type of literacy was divided into five levels. However, it should be noted that because the tasks used to derive literacy ability vary in difficulty, there is a range of abilities even among people within each level.

Level 1 (lowest) to Level 5 (highest)

Level 1

People at this level have very poor skills, and could be expected to experience considerable difficulties in using many of the print materials encountered in daily life. Some people at this level display the ability to locate a single piece of information in a relatively short piece of text, to enter a piece of information onto a document, or to perform simple arithmetic operations using numbers provided. However Level 1 also included those who could not complete such tasks.

Level 2

People at this level could be expected to experience some difficulty in using many of the printed materials encountered in daily life. While they would be able to use some printed material, this would generally be relatively simple, short and clearly structured, or require simple arithmetic operations to be performed on numbers that are easily determined from the source text.

Level 3

This level represents the ability to be able to cope with a varied range of material found in daily life and work. People at this level would not be able to use all printed material with a high level of proficiency, but they would demonstrate the ability to use longer, more complex printed material. They would be able to take conditional information into account, to make inferences, to compare and contrast information, and to extract numbers embedded into complex displays and perform more varied arithmetic operations.

Level 4

People at this level have good literacy skills, and display the ability to use higher order skills associated with matching and integration of information, with making higher order inferences, and with performing arithmetic operations where either the quantities or the operation to be performed are not easily determined.

Level 5

People at this level have very good literacy skills, and can make high level inferences, use complex displays of information, process conditional information and perform multiple operations sequentially.

General skill level distribution in the SAL

The skill level distribution of people aged 15-74 years was similar on each of the prose, document and quantitative literacy scales. About 2.6 million people had poor skills (Level 1) and could be expected to experience considerable difficulties in using many of the print materials that are encountered in daily life. About 3.6 million were at Level 2, and could be expected to experience some difficulties in using many of the printed materials that may be encountered in daily life. Level 3 was the largest category, and the skills of the 4.8 million people at this level would enable them to cope with many printed materials found in daily life and work, although not always with a high level of proficiency. Some 2.0 million people were at Level 4 representing good skills, and a relatively small number (300,000) were at Level 5, representing very good skills. People at both Level 4 and 5 are considered capable of managing the literacy demands of daily life.

Because Level 5 is a comparatively small group for the purposes of analysis, the SAL combined Levels 4 and 5 in most instances. The results also indicate that although people who were on one level on a particular scale were not on the same level on all three scales, it was generally true that the results indicated that people who had very poor (Level 1) or good (Level 4/5) skills were more likely to be at the same level on all three scales than those at Levels 2 and 3 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number and proportion at each skill level

Skill level	Prose scale		Document scale		Quantitative scale	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Level 1	2 607.4	9.7	2 580.3	19.5	2 531.8	19.2
Level 2	3 631.9	27.5	3 738.3	28.3	3 590.8	27.2
Level 3	4 668.9	35.3	4 774.2	36.1	4 764.0	36.0
Level 4	2 052.7	15.5	1880.8	14.2	2011.9	15.2
Level 5	259.9	2.0	247.2	1.9	311.3	2.4
Total	13,220.8	100.0	13 220.8	100.0	13 220.8	100.0

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Selected socio-demographic characteristics from the SAL

One of the key benefits of the Survey of Aspects of Literacy is that it enables a list of factors which militate literacy levels to be extrapolated. Having identified this list of factors, it then became possible in this study to compare this data set with household population survey data for the federal division of R*****, conducted by the Census of the same period. Only the major components are reported here (see Appendix B for a full SAL analysis of factors influencing Australian citizens' literacy levels).

First language English

One characteristic which related most strongly to English literacy skill level was whether English was the first language spoken. Of people who did not speak English as their first language, between 43% on the quantitative scale and 48% on the prose scale were at Level 1, representing approximately 1 million people. In comparison, 14% on each scale were native speakers and at Level 1 (about 1.5 million people), whilst some 18-20% of native speakers were at Level 4/5, compared with 7-8% for those whose first language was not English.

Educational attainment

Educational attainment is another characteristic strongly linked to literacy performance. In general, greater proportions of people with high skill levels had high levels of educational attainment compared with those at lower skill levels. For example, 65% of people at Level 4/5 on a prose scale had a post-school qualification, compared with 22% of people at Level 1.

Age and gender

Age and gender, which are ranked as SAL factors, are not described in detail here since the case study area defies the aging trend of Australian cities, and is mostly characterised by young families. This demographic pattern characterises the atypical local context whilst SAL findings indicate that, Australia wide, in general, younger people have higher literacy levels. Additionally, the gender balance was proportional in the senior age groups where lower literacy skills tend to become more characteristic of females. The different results may also reflect, to some extent, traditional differences in fields of study and employment opportunities for males and females.

Labour force status

There was a clear relationship between literacy skill level and labour force status. Depending on the literacy scale, 11% to 12% of employed people were at Level 1. The corresponding percentages for unemployed people were 30% to 31%, and for those who were not in the labour force, the proportions were even larger. The proportions at Level 2 in each labour force category were similar, but significantly larger proportions of employed people were at Levels 3 and 4/5, compared with unemployed people and those not in the labour force.

Income

Just 6% of people on Level 1 on the prose scale received an annual income in the highest quintile, compared with 30% of people at Level 4/5. Some 63% of people on Level 1 on the prose scale were on the two lowest income quintiles. The income distributions for Levels 2 and 3 were similar to the distribution for the total population. The results on the document and quantitative scales were similar, but the proportion of people on Level 4/5 on the quantitative scale who were in the top income quintile was the highest of all scales, at 37%. This may be because a greater proportion of males were on Level 4/5 on the quantitative scale compared with females, and males tend to have larger incomes.

Indigenous people

Significantly greater proportions of indigenous peoples were at low literacy levels compared with other people who spoke English as their first language, and their skills showed more variation across the three scales. Some 41% were at Level 1 on the prose scale, 45% were at Level 1 on the document scale, and 47% were at Level 1 on the quantitative scale. Different levels of educational attainment may explain these results to some extent. Some 62% of indigenous peoples did not complete the highest level of secondary school (the corresponding figure for other people whose first language was English was 36%).

Objective assessment compared with self-assessment

Survey respondents were asked to rate their own basic reading, writing and mathematical skills in the context of "the needs of daily life". Some interesting discrepancies occurred which can perhaps be explained in

terms of individuals' constructions of the term "needs of life", and their access to and usage of 'institutional' literacies.

Self-rating of reading skills and objective assessment of prose literacy

Almost all (92%) of those who rated their reading skills for the needs of daily life as poor were at the lowest level on the prose scale, with negligible proportions at each of the other levels.

Of those who rated their skills for daily life as excellent, 28% were at Levels 1 and 2 on the prose scale. It may seem incongruous that some people who were objectively assessed as having relatively poor literacy skills rated their skills as excellent or good. One possible explanation for this is that people with lower skill levels who had little need to use advanced skills in daily life, may consider their skills good enough to meet the demands placed upon them and, accordingly, rate their skills for the needs of daily life as good, or even excellent.

Self-rating of basic mathematical skills and objective assessment of quantitative skills

Of those who rated their basic mathematical skills for the needs of daily life as poor, 79% were at Level 1 and 15% were at Level 2. This pattern suggests that the relationship between self-rating these skills and objective assessment is not as close as the relationship between self-rated reading and assessed prose literacy, where almost all who self-assessed as poor were indeed at the lowest skill level.

The other interesting discrepancy which emerges in this area is that, although most of those who rated their skills as good had lower to mid range skills, a significant 12% were at Level 4/5. Of those who rated their mathematical skills as excellent, 44% were at Level 3 and 33% at Level 4/5, but significant proportions were at Levels 1 and 2 (23%). This again raises the perception of the individual as to what skills in mathematics are perceived as "good" or "adequate" "for the needs of daily life" and what the daily needs of life are perceived to be.

Population demographics of the Selfhelp City study area

The case study area was selected because of certain crucial indicators of disadvantage in the local population statistics, which literature (e.g. Reder, 1998) and the SAL (1997) had indicated were particularly salient

for research into connections between literacy, social capital, social transformation and community development, and lifelong learning. Only those which are the most significant have been included in this report, however, a full analysis of all demographic factors was undertaken, and has been appended to the Report (Appendix A). Summarily, these chief factors of disadvantage relevant to Selfhelp City are educational attainment, socio-economic status, especially income distribution, employment, and the likelihood of continuous stable employment opportunities, family constellations, ethnicity and the placement and support of infrastructure like housing, childcare and transport, and education and training services.

Location and population

Most of the City of Selfhelp falls geographically into the Federal electorate of R*****. Small pockets also fall into two other federal electorates but not areas large enough to influence the overall figures. The population of Selfhelp City has increased dramatically since its inception in 1966. The annual average growth rates from 1966-1976 were extremely high at 18.56%, declining to 2.31% between 1991 and 1996. This trend is likely to continue as land resources for further residential development become more limited. The West District had the highest annual population growth rate at 6.06% between 1991 and 1996. The Central and North Districts which are the older built-up areas of Selfhelp City, have had small population declines due to reductions in household sizes, and limited land available for residential development.

The total City population in 1996 was 162,665 persons, housed in approximately 65,000 rateable dwellings. Projections estimated that around 17,329 households would be formed in Selfhelp City between 1996 and 2006. The South and West Districts are projected to accommodate around 67% of this projected growth.

In 1998, Selfhelp City was very much a city of young families. In 1996, Selfhelp City had a higher proportion of couples with children (44.44%) than the Brisbane Statistical District (BSD) (35.73%) and Queensland (34.94%). Selfhelp City also had a higher proportion of lone person households (24.72%) compared to the BSD (21.65%) and Queensland (21.65%). Since 1998, the proportion of couples with children has decreased by 21%; lone person households have increased by 11% and one parent families have risen by 7.5%. The statistics for Queensland, however, have changed very little in this time.

In 1996, Selfhelp City had higher proportions of people in all age groups up to 19 years and for age groups 29-49 years compared to the BSD and Queensland. Selfhelp City correspondingly had lower proportions of people in all age groups over 50 years, compared to the BSD and Queensland, a trend defying the "aging Australia" mantra. The current age/sex profile of Selfhelp City supplied by the Council in 2000 indicates a need for facilities and services for children and young families, such as educational facilities, child care services, sport and recreational facilities. The profile also includes a future need for employment, new housing and higher education facilities as children grow and leave home to study, to work and to establish households of their own.

In Selfhelp in 1996, almost three quarters of the population (72.41%) were born in Australia. A further 13.92% were born in English speaking countries. The Aboriginal population, whilst statistically quite small, is characteristically young and particularly disadvantaged, with high youth crime and truancy levels, and low school retention rates. Of the population, 10.16% were born in non–English speaking countries, but no one group constituted more than 1.00% of the population. However, of the 161 countries from which residents were drawn, Selfhelp City had higher proportions of some groups than the BSD.

Selfhelp City's total population comprises 10.16% of the BSD total population so any proportion of a national group over 10.16% indicates that Selfhelp has a higher proportion of this national group compared to the BSD as a whole. The groups of particular significance here are people born in Western Samoa, Tonga, Yugoslavia, Boznia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Romania. Many of these are both recent and 'old' refugees, many without formal English language ability. Additionally between August 1991 and March 1998, 2,685 overseas settlers in Australia nominated Selfhelp as their destination. They were mainly from Yugoslavia, England, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Fiji.

Educational attainment

In 1996, Selfhelp had a significantly lower proportion of people aged 15 years and over with a degree or diploma (9.49%) compared to the BSD (16.88%) and Queensland (13.75%). Correspondingly, the City had a higher proportion of people in the same age groups with no formal qualifications (64.97%) compared to the BSD (59.56%) and Queensland (61.48%).

Socio-economic status

In 1996, Selfhelp City had about the same proportion of dwellings which were "being purchased" (64.96%) as the BSD (66.78%) and Queensland (64.96%).This reflects the younger community in Selfhelp with many people still paying off their homes. However Selfhelp had a significantly higher proportion of public housing (7.12%) compared to the BSD (4.87%) and Queensland (3.95%). Affordability of housing in Selfhelp is related to the supply and demand for housing and land. The home and unit prices are reported to have varied very little over the period 1991-6. Property values are on 1992/3 levels.

In 1996, the poverty line for a 'standard family of two adults and two children in which one adult works' was $418 per week. Selfhelp had a lower proportion of households earning less than $500 per week (30.25%) compared to the BSD (32.70%) and Queensland (36.06%), but effectively, almost one third of the City lived below the poverty line. The poverty line for single persons was $223 a week. Women outnumbered men in Selfhelp in all income categories below $399. Simply put, this means that single unemployed women are the poorest of all in Selfhelp, closely followed by sole parent families living on a single female wage or a single family pension payment.

Employment

The retail trade was the largest employer of Selfhelp residents in 1996 employing 11,400 people or 16.62% of residents. The manufacturing industry (16.62%), the construction industry (9.09%), the property and business services (8.72%) and the wholesale trade (8.84%) were also large employers of Selfhelp residents. All these industries are precarious in the face of a downturn in the construction industry or the manufacturing industry or the global economy. The number of males in the workforce outnumbered females in all age groups.

At Census time 1996, Selfhelp City had 38,873 jobs or 6.27% of the total jobs available in the BSD. These jobs were performed by 68,590 residents. However not all the jobs in Selfhelp were held by residents, equally many residents travelled outside Selfhelp to work, roughly 60-65% in each case. Most of the businesses in Selfhelp were small businesses with 0-3 employees (51.89%) and with annual turnovers of less than $500,000. The majority had full time employees (67.24%) and the largest proportion could be called service providers (55.35%), followed by retailers (24.67%).

The unemployment rate (proportion of persons unemployed to all persons in the labour force) was 10.7%, with the South and Central Districts having significantly higher rates than other Districts. This figure compares with 9.8% Queensland wide. A pattern of higher unemployment in the South and Central Districts persists.

Youth unemployment is a serious issue in Selfhelp. The official rate for under age 19 years at April 1998 was 27.3% for general unemployment and 31.2% for the full time unemployment rate. The full time unemployment rate is 2.0% higher than for Queensland and 3.4% higher than for the whole of Australia (Teenage Regional Labour Force Estimates, DEETYA, April 1998). Local groups however estimate that the youth unemployment rate could be closer to 50%.

Selfhelp City has the highest hidden unemployment levels in the state, with a large part time casual labour force in Selfhelp working as little as three to four hours per week. It is hidden because official figures fail to consider the high rate of unemployment among women and NESB and ATSI communities. They also fail to acknowledge underemployment, particularly for youth. People undertake further or longer education because they cannot get a job. They rely upon income support from a part pension, part benefit, spouse or parent, because jobs are unavailable — but only because jobs are unavailable — and do not appear in unemployment figures, according to the City profile published by the local Council. More males than females have been unemployed from 1990 to 1996. Over the period, female unemployment has varied between 30% to 50% of persons unemployed; figures for males have varied between 50% to 70% of persons unemployed.

Welfare recipients

In September 1997, 76,234 pensions and benefits were paid by the Department of Social Security (DSS, now Centrelink) in Selfhelp City, although some individuals may receive more than one kind of payment. The proportions of the population receiving Social Security payments are as follows:

Age Pensions (7619)	= 4.62%
Disability Support (4770)	= 2.89%
Sole Parent Pension (5240)	= 3.18%
Labour Market Allowances (10,156)	= 6.16%

The most highly populated districts have the highest number of aged, disability support, carer and sole parent pensions, as well as the highest

number of other payments, notably Newstart Allowance and family and parenting allowances. There appears to be a disproportionate and growing high number of disability pensioners living in Selfhelp.

Until recently, unemployment services were provided through community based and government agencies, and principally funded through Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, with income support provided through Centrelink. The method of funding having changed, Commonwealth Employment Service (now Employment National), Skillshare and other unemployment service providers have become competitors for tendering for this work.

Unemployment services

Unemployment services in Selfhelp which have been reduced or ceased operating altogether over the period 1996-1998 include:

- CES S*****wood — closed Oct 1996;
- Job Skills Program (for the long term unemployed) — ceased Nov 1996;
- Access Inc (W***ridge) — reduced from 37 to 6 staff currently;
- Literacy Unit (Special Intervention Program) — ceased operation;
- Choices Program — youth employment and secondary school support progam — ceased operation;
- Job Club, W***ridge– defunded, ceased operation;
- Employment Services Regulatory Authority — Case Management — defunded;
- Job Club S*****wood — defunded, ceased operations; Skillshare, S*****wood — ceased operations;
- ITEC — Skillshare info-tech specialist program — funded until 1997 and only operating a small program in 1998;
- DETYA no longer has a presence in Selfhelp in its own right having closed the regional office in W***ridge.

Education and training provision

Educational and learning facilities in Selfhelp consist mainly of schools public and private, including pre-schools, a TAFE and a University. There are 27 pre-schools, 26 state and 8 private primary schools, 10 state and 4 private secondary schools, and the Selfhelp State Special school for students aged five to eighteen years.

Formal tertiary education runs from the Selfhelp Institute of TAFE located at M*****brook, providing accredited courses in Certificate to Advanced Diploma levels, including Language and Literacy. It also offers cyber and internet related product skills through the Institute's Cyberskills Workshop in S*****wood and short courses through the Adult Community Education Unit. Griffith University operates the Selfhelp campus which opened in 1998 in the south of the City and has around 2000 enrolments in 2001.

Elsewhere in Selfhelp, training is provided by small interest groups and private providers — there are 1,400 community organisations of all types in this city — business academies, the Nanny School and organisations like Access Inc, Selfhelp ITEC, and Group Training Australia. However, for poor people and people with disabilities, transport and access barriers to educational services and facilities continue to cause problems. For example, the Selfhelp TAFE is not on the railway line. Other barriers may be language, literacy and numeracy difficulties for recently arrived migrants and refugees, the costs of transport and childcare, the demands of 'mutual obligation' activities, low to extremely low socio-economic status, low social skills, low self-esteem, parenting responsibilities, poor physical and mental health, cultural and ethnic barriers, and lack of adequate and integrated funded programs.

Implications for literacy research in Selfhelp City

The population demographics of the City of Selfhelp in all respects indicate the likelihood that significant groups within this area are at Levels 1 to 3 on the scales of literacy articulated by the SAL. Even more pertinently, significant groups in the Selfhelp City population are drawn from those sub-sets which share factors of age, educational attainment, income distribution, ESL background and employment status likely to predispose them to showing both higher characteristics of disadvantage but also lower literacy/numeracy skills than the general population of the Brisbane Statistical Division.

A study of perceptions of literacy need and service provision, including literacy and numeracy provision to accommodate and achieve socially transformative change within the Selfhelp City area, was undertaken for the following reasons:

- Demographically, Selfhelp City is a city of young families (with a large proportion of sole parent families), still growing in population and still engaged with the planning and processes of providing education and training for these families for the present and near future.
- Educational attainment in Selfhelp City is low and, according to the SAL, this is among the most significant factors in pre-determining low literacy outcomes and socio-economic status.
- Whilst Selfhelp City does not have a significant ATSI population, this population is young and underemployed or unemployed.
- It also has significant pockets of NESB residents and refugee enclaves, a factor which predisposes these groups to disadvantage in becoming literate in English.
- Because housing affordability is still within the average employed resident's grasp, and the provision of low cost public housing at a rate above the BSD still continues for low socio-economic status residents, there is an indication of a continued population growth in a lower income, lower educational attainment sector which is predisposed to literacy disadvantage.
- Unemployment in Selfhelp, especially for youth, is high, and likely to remain high, and the SAL indicates the strong correlation between low socio-economic status, low income and low literacy skills.
- Industry in Selfhelp is in areas which are vulnerable in the face of any local or global economic downturn.
- Selfhelp is under-represented in outlets for community services, government administration and education services compared to the BSD and state profiles.
- Hidden unemployment or 'underemployment' in Selfhelp is a significant issue with a very large number of residents working in part time and casual jobs, or a significant number not participating in the labour market at all because of the receipt of Social Security income. These individuals reflect the characteristics of the SAL which equated both low income and/or little or no labour market participation with low literacy skills.
- Unemployment services in Selfhelp City, including literacy and numeracy training, have been materially eroded since 1996 despite labour market deregulation and competitive tendering for these programs.

- Education, community and health services have not yet been significantly expanded to make transformative change in the community despite early beginnings in these areas.
- Improving the baseline for literacy/numeracy competence may be one of several ways to attempt some transformative social change at a community level.

The purpose of the next phase of the project was to examine more closely the relationship between established indicators of low literacy attainment, and the day-to-day experiences of people with low literacy skills in the area under study. Interviews with selected participants provides the opportunity to explore this connection.

7 Interview analysis

The first phase of this stage of the project involved a scan of the interview data to secure a sense of the main features of the talk, followed by the identification of sections of talk that exemplify these features. Following this stage, the interview and focus-group data was analysed using membership categorisation analysis (MCA). As a tool, MCA is a particular "analytic procedure which can be used to show how a particular social and moral order has been established in and by the kinds of categories and category-bound activities through which people … are represented" (Castleton, 2000: 92).

Interviewees were selected for the various perspectives they could offer to the examination of the relationship between literacy and life trajectories. From an ethnomethodological perspective, the selected interviewees are members of the particular context of social activity under study, and are practical actors involved in the ongoing achievement and enactment of that context. In Hester and Eglin's (1997: 1) terms, they are "practical analysts of, and inquirers into, the world, using whatever materials there are at hand to get done the tasks and business they are engaged in". Everyday, mundane tasks are overwhelmingly conducted through language, especially talk, so an analysis of the talk of members of any particular context becomes an invaluable way of inquiring into the social world.

As each of the interviewees had some functional knowledge of the relationship between literacy and life trajectories, the researchers were able to assume that they would be able to interpret these concepts in a meaningful way that would be shaped and constrained by their orientations to institutions, practices and particular settings (Castleton et al, 1999: 113). Informants' talk drew on a cultural history of professional and community interpretations, in which they not only depicted themselves, but depicted and placed others significant to this project. Their talk presented as meaningful and trustworthy, characterising people with low levels of literacy in particular ways and they themselves, in turn, were being characterised by users with low levels of literacy skill who, nevertheless, talked meaningfully of their perceptions of more accomplished people.

Competing and conflicting discourses

In analysing informants' talk of the literacy needs and status of their clients, three streams of consciousness and reflectivity emerged. The term 'public' has been adopted to cover these streams in the domain of public or 'institutional' literacy operations, 'social' to cover the domain of community usages of literacy, and 'vernacular' to cover personal or 'private' literacy practices. These three groupings, or ways of being in the world (discourses), enabled each of the informants, in various ways, to categorise people (according to their literacy skills) and literate practices, as well as to explain how and why literate practices vary according to the categories which into people are assigned.

In identifying these three broad areas of focus by interviewees, one cannot categorically claim that there is no overlap between foci and concerns, nor transfer between one discourse or another. In fact, this overlap and overlay was a characteristic of those whose conversational mode and concerns operated largely around the 'social' level, and to a lesser extent, all interviewees were able to shift between one mode of discourse and another. But it still remains generally true, particularly for those speakers in the 'public' and 'private' discourses, that this tended to be their more predominant form, with occasional shifts to other discourses, only to return inevitably to their principal form. Examples of these slippages between discourses will be quoted later in this section.

Public discourse

The first stream of talk is called the 'public' plane of discourse, that is, responses which talked about literacy in the institutional or operational context. This occurred where literacy related to formal activities like reading and writing and usage for public operations, such as presenting at work or for work, for Centrelink procedures or other bureaucratic activities, or where literacy was a set or sets of skills useful for performing and remaining at school or in vocational education and training. This level of response was generally most characteristic of individuals who were themselves located within the public arena and had provenance of public programs, or were responsible for administration of public funds, or for the administration or management of other public programs, and sometimes for literacy/numeracy programs.

Social discourse

The second area which could be identified was at the 'social' or 'community' plane of discourse. This involved responses about the ramifications of literacy usage for social or community life; levels of literacy required for individuals to participate in neighborhoods and achieve social goals; whole community responsiveness to factors of disadvantage, including employment and socio-economic issues; and social cohesion and positive community development. This level of response was in general characteristic of literacy and other field practitioners, and those with a professional interest or responsibility in urban planning/development or community renewal. Some responses from individuals whose principle discourse was still in the public area could be identified here as well, where they had responsibility or interest in community development projects.

Private discourse

The final plane was the immediately 'private' discourse, and was most characteristic of some, but not all, practitioners and most clients themselves. This devolved to strategising about how to "get around" low skills and lack of formal education; the mechanics of what to do in practical terms to, for example, manage the systems and literacies of bureaucracy; how to keep kids at school, change parents' attitudes to learning and coach better budgeting and parenting practices; encourage and build better self-esteem; the personal factors as to why it was, for example, important to develop curricula, teaching or training materials which were usable by low skilled individuals, and so on. Even individuals who were predominantly employing discourses from the public arena still resorted to this level when asked, for instance, to explain their own view of the meaning and uses of literacy, and to attribute characteristics to low skilled clients which they had observed during their professional experiences.

Subjecting all the interview data to MCA enabled the talk to be analysed in ways which are encapsulated by the following diagram, indicating categories of literacy users and their attributes, relationships and transference between the three areas. The diagram shows that individuals and groups who operate predominantly out of these categories, but particularly the first and the last, define and act on their understandings of the relationships between them and the literacy strategies which they employ.

The arrows which indicate the flow of influences both back and forward from the central set are generally reciprocal and balanced. What this reveals is that people who simultaneously operate with 'institutional' and 'vernacular' (defined as 'social') literacy practices can create balance between usage, values and purposes in their own literate operations. They can also transfer meaning-making out of and for the practices of other users of both types of 'institutional' and 'vernacular' literacy.

It is not coincidental that the arrows which mark the flow of influence from the two outlying figures are larger but, simultaneously, much more problematic in terms of the power of these influences. The arrow from the 'public' to the 'private' domain is shorter and more powerful, as defined in the talk of users; the arrow in reverse is longer and more attenuated because the negotiated reciprocal influence is not as palpable, nor is it perceived by users to be actually as powerful.

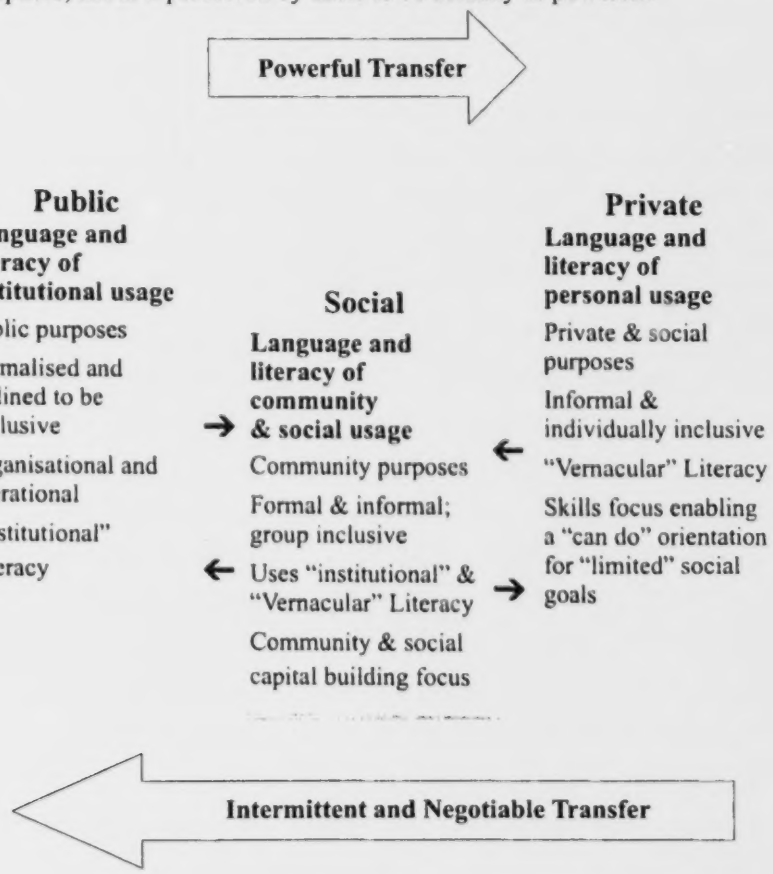
Powerful Transfer
Public
Language and literacy of institutional usage
Public purposes
Formalised and inclined to be exclusive
Organisational and operational
"Institutional" Literacy
Social
Language and literacy of community & social usage
Community purposes
Formal & informal; group inclusive
Uses "institutional" & "Vernacular" Literacy
Community & social capital building focus
Private
Language and literacy of personal usage
Private & social purposes
Informal & individually inclusive
"Vernacular" Literacy
Skills focus enabling a "can do" orientation for "limited" social goals
Intermittent and Negotiable Transfer

Fig 1: Number and proportion at each skill level

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Constructing the 'vernacular' user

This (mis?)perception of power occurs because bureaucratic discourses in the 'public' arena can mediate social relationships in particularly controlling ways. The power differential present enables the categorising work that people do to position the users of their own discourses but, equally importantly, position significant others who do not use the same discourses, to be 'judged' in relation to the formal literacy practices of the bureaucratic user. It will be argued that the central set of characteristics (i.e. Social), represents a preferred model of practice for potential service provision and supported policy elements for disadvantaged communities like Selfhelp City. This is because it operates in some senses 'above and beyond' the bureaucratic and deficit based judgements which 'institutional' users make about 'vernacular' users.

A particular example of this positioning of users in a particular kind of discourse occurred in the talk of the Manager of a Multicultural Neighbourhood Centre (who was the only white Anglo-Saxon employee of the whole organisation) who reported the low text literacy skills of professional, ESL colleagues in the following terms:

> *I have to get out the red pen ... Coming from the council which is quite bureaucratic, mainly white Anglo, you know, and coming here and ...um the level of skill or the level of written skill I guess particularly, not the language skill, not the spoken, for me, yeah, has been quite a concern I guess even through some of the professional workers ... when I first came here I was actually quite shocked I guess.*

There was no doubt that he believed and trusted in the quality of the service that his colleagues, professional and unpaid volunteer alike, were providing. This was demonstrated when the same individual reflected on the contribution made by the trainers in his organisation to a forum on professional literacy teaching:

> *some of our teachers went to a QAELLN workshop some time ago* ...[and]*they found that actually other people in the class were more interested in what they were doing because actually they found that they were doing it, where others were struggling to do, so I'm a bit amazed.*

Thus in some sense the first quotation was a kind of tale against himself and a meta-critical reflection on his own experience and attitudes brought from a different style of bureaucratic employment. Nonetheless, he still clearly positioned text-based reporting as the 'institutional' mode of

literacy, thereby categorising his ESL colleagues and the verbal utterances at which they excelled, as a secondary, perhaps less valued form of communication. In addition he passes a moral judgement on their use of 'vernacular' as opposed to 'institutional' literacies, clearly identifying the prominence he gives to the former.

The consequences of the powerful judgements of the 'public' discourse user in the evaluation of the nature and character of the 'vernacular' user was also identified in another but related context. The context is characterised by two factors: not necessarily having first hand experience of encountering other 'real' 'vernacular' users in a variety of situations, and secondly, encounters in settings not orchestrated by the 'institutional' users' control over the setting. Two examples of this context of 'public' discourse users categorising non users of their own literate discourse are seen in the comments of two local politicians, given in response to a question determining their awareness of low literacy among their constituents.

> *I don't think it's surprising that people who come into the office* ***want*** *to actually talk. So I wouldn't see that as a strategy to compensate for reading and writing disadvantage. I just see that as a normal thing to do.*

And from his colleague:

> *...but I guess it's not something that is glaringly obvious to me in the work I do locally. I mean I've been here about seven or eight months and I don't think that I've* ***ever*** *had someone say to me that they can't read and it's never become apparent to me in my dealings with someone that they can't read or write...a fair ability to disguise that or hide it ... a fair reluctance to admit it.*

The full context of their interviews revealed that both these individuals were undoubtedly sympathetic to their constituency and based their political practice on a practical program of providing every possible opportunity to disadvantaged groups in the community, without discrimination against low literacy skill. Nonetheless, the non use by *their clients* of a specific 'institutional' mode of discourse, to some degree, made the issue of their constituents' poor literacy status and any compensating strategies almost invisible to them personally. The politicians conceived of the difficulties of low skilled clients via a second hand agenda of highly literate, 'institutional' research, and other findings conveyed by the media (and in this case also by the researchers involved in this project) in relation to literacy in their own areas. These political informants 'knew' because they were able to read and listen credibly with

a high degree of critical literacy about the 'problem', and thus anticipate or second guess low literacy skills with given individuals or in orchestrated settings e.g. in the Alternative School or with NESB interviewees in their electorate offices. But their own high skills in 'institutional' forms of literacy, in some ways, kept the personal manifestations of the strategies of lowly skilled 'vernacular' users from their immediate experience. According to these informants, the very people with the most literacy difficulty tended not to be present or, if they were, masked their lack of proficiency. It is interesting to note that this was an explicit claim made by one of the political informants. The other made the somewhat more traditional distinction that those clients who came to see him did so only to talk, and not because they were incapable of writing text, and that this was in every sense normative behaviour. In this latter case, individual adults with literacy needs are present very much by their absence.

Thus 'vernacular' users were well able to be construed at a distance, and even their characteristics described, but they were not often personally encountered, and then often in stereotypical contexts. The logical consequence of this construction of users is that, if not balanced by critical discourse skills and a commitment to some agenda of social justice and access on the part of the 'institutional' user, 'vernacular' users and their skills could remain stereotyped, disempowered and of a lesser value in managing daily living.

Another unintended consequence which was alluded to in the talk of several interviewees in the public area, or literacy practitioners, was that the 'vernacular' discourse and its users also remained invisible to the major public literacy providers.

They just won't go there... It looks like an institution.

According to a number of informants, low skilled clients do not present at the TAFE or in learning programs run out of schools, because of the fear of repetition of unfavorable learning experiences previously encountered in other formal learning environments. This invisibility of the most needy of clients was further exacerbated by several factors. These included the issue of equity and access, where there are minimal entrance level skill requirements, and where fees are required to be paid by literacy clients whose other economic needs are self-perceived to be far more pressing.

According to a number of informants, many 'vernacular' literacy users were more comfortable within their networks that included brokers or mentoring members with slightly higher skills, than they would be in institutional learning environments able to meet their daily living needs.

In this case, there was no need for them to present to TAFE for further instruction, particularly if it cost them scarce financial resources. Other physical or infrastructure support factors, like inaccessibility to cheap and convenient public transport, the siting of learning institutions, and the ready availability of cheap local childcare, are also relevant in influencing 'vernacular' users' choices and options.

Two further examples highlight how users of both 'institutional' and 'vernacular' forms of literacy categorise others who have only one, the 'vernacular', literacy at their disposal. The first instance occurred in an interview with a private literacy provider who developed and delivered a pre-vocational literacy program for low skilled local women seeking to return to work. This trainer and curriculum designer, stated that

> *friends and family members are often in exactly the same boat as themselves... they have someone who interprets on behalf of the group. Well* ***they're*** *talking about the CES and you know, it's long gone.*

This example illustrates that trusted brokers often share the same social circumstances as the lesser skilled recipients of their literacy practices. Furthermore, the perception of the currency and reliability of these skills, and the information on offer from the mentor, was often highly subjective. Whilst the informant's perception implied that the strictures of limited economic circumstances actually also mediated the power and currency of real literacy skills, the potential to work with these brokers and ensure that their information and skills are current, is a valuable way of developing and building community capacity.

The second example came from a migrant resettlement officer with a service which also offered community-based literacy programs. He was able to speak with the familiarity of having been a former refugee who used 'vernacular' literacies in his personal and client interactions but also used and generated 'institutional' literacy practices in his interactions with businesses, employers and bureaucracies on their behalf. He expressed a wish for a form of 'institutional' literacy for his clients, but in their own languages. It was noted that his interpretation of literacy was both:

> *For me, the ability to communicate in reading and writing to manage your own life ... but working in partnerships with for example with the businesses in the area, OK . So it's employment training and language training at the same time ... promote projects in communities language and I think that was a very*

> *effective way... I think translation is very important to have, to have information in community language.*

It was he who reported that 'vernacular' users, in using their literacy practices with spoken fluency in their own communities, limit and restrict that world by choice here.

> *I find ... interacting, that's a common thing they don't want to interact* [with mainstream communities]

The implication of his talk was that ethnic community speakers relied upon their own language and literacy 'brokers' whose dealings with external agencies were often heavily culturally circumscribed. He made the judgement that this circumscription was a matter of choice, and that cultural constraints mitigated the actual literacy skill of the 'broker'.

Clients' perceptions of literacy and life management

A constantly recurring characterisation of all interviewees, sometimes including judgements clients made about themselves, was the conjunction between low literacy and low self-esteem. Almost all speakers, whether from the 'public' or 'social' groups, mentioned that

> *They think they're stupid ... from school onwards they've been told they're stupid ... they can't achieve as well as other people ... they're embarrassed when their kids get better skills than they do ... they have this anti attitude to learning and you'd be surprised how many actively pass on that message to their kids.*

Vernacular speakers from the 'private' discourse also used this self-characterisation — that is, of being at a less intelligent or educated order of operations. For example, a young disabled literacy client said:

> *My Dad thinks I only come here because I've got a boyfriend here ... I've been going to TAFE literacy for about eight years.*

This condemnation and self-abasement was not only in relation to literacy ability, but to all areas where written or spoken literacy skills were needed, like, for example, health:

> *I don't think they're assertive enough that if they go to a doctor they could say to that doctor "I want a second opinion" because they're not up to it.*

and even areas like questioning teachers at their children's school, caring for elderly dependents, taking on less literate partners' indebtedness, or entering into poorly considered or detrimental financial arrangements themselves:

They don't have the confidence just to say
[to the mobile phone company] *"hey, look, I just can't afford this" and they sign up and it's too late.*

and even venturing out on unfamiliar territory:

Look, they're ok here but you get them to have to go all the way into the RBH or the PA for a test, then they can't cope with the buses or the signs.

The categorisation of these clients with only a single 'vernacular' form literacy (in the view of users of both 'public' and 'social' literacy) was summed up in the following telling comment:

They can't say no because like everybody else they just want the same standard of living and I find that a major impact of not having literacy skills is that they can't order their lives and it's something that ***our*** [authors' emphasis] *people take for granted, but it's something they can't do.*

This view juxtaposed two different kinds of worlds, sorted 'them' and 'us' into two different kinds of people, characteristic of the 'natural' and 'commonsense' tendency to work in binaries. The first world is ordered and filled with people who have the skills to regulate and manage life; the second world is disordered and populated by individuals without these organising skills. Thus the informant is not only offering a description of her perceptions of the world(s), but also offering a moral or value judgement on the quality of life of the inhabitants.

Consequences of living with 'vernacular' literacy

Of equal frequency as the identification of low self-esteem and low literacy skill was the description by many literate practitioners of all the barriers in daily living which 'vernacular' users must leap in order to simply take charge of survival needs. Interviewees in the 'social' category with both forms of 'institutional' and 'vernacular' literacy were well able to do this. Generally they projected a great degree of sympathy and understanding, even identification, when describing these barriers for their clients, as they appeared to readily hear and comprehend their customers' difficulties. They 'knew' the barriers because they listened to and 'lived' with the experience of their clients, especially if they had the background experience of having once been clients themselves. The most frequently described obstacle was the lack of cheap and accessible public

transport in this area (although it is acknowledged that no single factor, like improving public transport, would be sufficient to solve all the problems of access and equity in relation to literacy and numeracy assistance and training). This was a universal complaint across all types of interviewees and factors, as was the failure to site TAFE in relation to the limited public transport available, further exacerbating the limited access lowly skilled clients had to these programs, had they wanted to attend at all.

Summary of literacy uses

In summary, the informants in the study who were users of both forms of literacy are in the dichotomous position of identifying a huge polarity between their own capacities, and those of users 'limited' by low skills. However, it is vital to note that at the same time, they are able to describe the skills which these individuals use for the benefit of the community, and they readily acknowledge the achievement of personal and social goals by 'vernacular' users in limited and social contexts. These contexts include friendship and family interest groups, especially constructed learning circles and special training programs, like targeted parent education programs and women's health talks, and in forums specifically created for proactive participation by such users, e.g. community consultative processes in the local community renewal program.

Generally, community workers also make informed and persuasive arguments for funded programs which appeal to and anticipate the needs of strongly 'vernacular' users and the use of appropriate materials, pedagogy and strategies within program delivery for disadvantaged clients with low formal educational attainment. They are the strongest proponents of an approach to adult education which takes up the call for lifelong learning that enables the community to access and use learning environments over a continuing chain of intersections in the individuals' and the community's life. Additionally, they understand that by building upon 'vernacular' competency and valuing it as a genuine communal form of interaction, they and 'vernacular' users are actually developing proactive community capacity to stand alongside compromising or precarious economic circumstances.

There was a strong distinction to be made between individuals who operated primarily out of 'public' discourses, with only occasional 'private' use of vernacular discourses, and those who among the study's informants were comfortably able to use both discourses simultaneously.

Above all, users who were confident and competent with both of these forms of literacy practices were able to do four things:

- understand and value 'vernacular' users in their own linguistic terms and use their discourse back in reply;
- generate a discourse both to and on behalf of 'vernacular' users which used the key features of the 'institutional' form, and which addressed issues related to bureaucratic institutions and demands in appropriate terms;
- pinpoint the disjunctions between these two discourses and, in the case of many professional workers in the literacy field, actually teach social/'vernacular' literacy which would be suitable for meeting many basic 'institutional' language / literacy demands for primarily 'vernacular' users;
- amalgamate the provision of learning opportunities into a philosophy of lifelong learning which did not limit adult education to formal educational institutions or settings, but rather recognised the value of the informal learning which takes place in communities on a daily basis.

Four examples of this social literacy approach to meeting individual and community needs were reported in the talk with interviewees in this project. They were programs like "Literacy for the Learners' Permit test" run for young disabled people; the special selection of highly visual training materials for the literacy program for low skilled women seeking pre-vocational skills before returning to work; the public small 'talks' and discussion sessions without any print material, but a back-up telephone service for migrant women who wished to clarify or reinforce questions after the 'talk' at the Women's Health Centre; and the customised voluntary training program for recent refugees at the Migrant Resource Centre. These examples provide evidence of how effective programs can be in building social capital and community capacity, as they simultaneously improve individual's skill levels for the tasks of daily living as they are perceived by that person.

8 Findings

This project set out to look at the perceptions of community service providers about the literacy needs of their low skilled and otherwise disadvantaged client group. In addition, it sought to explore the ways of the community in understanding and responding to the literacy needs of particular individuals and groups within the community. The stages of the project, from searching out some theoretical and conceptual models of literacy in social practice, through to the collection and analysis of interviews conducted by informants in the local community, revealed a rich relationship between a certain type of literacy discourse and the ability of individuals and their community to be adaptable, responsive to needs and change, and proactive and confident about managing their personal lives and planning for their communal future.

Community organisations' perceptions of literacy

What was found was a series of networks in service provision to the local community which was conscious of the implication of lower literacy skills in a plethora of clients' problems. However, the networks were found to work under difficult circumstances, caused by poorly coordinated resourcing cycles and competition for limited funding. Maintaining essential services (some construed as even more basic to the client's life than literacy training) meant allowing clients re-entry many times into the same programs as a form of financial relief. This, as has been observed in this study, can also include literacy training, where that is the source and modus operandi for receiving funding for support with client's basic living needs. Nor was it sometimes possible to act on the fact that the very clients whom some services are assisting are being seen and serviced by several other organisations, and thus to strive for better integration of service provision across the board.

Responding to local literacy need: making a bridge through social literacy

Locally led and managed literacy programs, based in the community sector, appear to have the best attendance of clients and the overall endorsement of the community. However their funding is almost impossibly low, and the programs run because of the enormous goodwill

and commitment of significant key training and management personnel. The potential of these programs suffered though, because it does not appear that key personnel are being replaced as the natural attrition of time and the ability to continue unpaid effort takes its toll. Furthermore, their pedagogical practices are not well documented unless by an "inspired amateur in the field", so much valuable community teaching experience has constantly to be 're-invented' with changing personnel, which leads to a further negative impact on the overall success of the programs.

There is a lack of leadership skills in community groups, some of them being literacy based, and a lack of continuity and cohesion of programs which are aimed at developing community expertise. Some of the unemployment programs which have ceased in Selfhelp City include Literacy/Numeracy programs. Whilst the local public provider still undertakes this form of training for the community, including voluntary tutor training for non profit community groups, there is an underlying general level of suspicion in some community groups, e.g. school drop outs, long term unemployed or redundant individuals with mostly manual labouring skills, refugees and recent victims of torture and repression, so that the identification of these programs with institutional settings actively discourages community participation.

Evidence of 'vernacular' and 'institutional' literacy in local practice

Distinguishing 'institutional' versus 'vernacular' literacy skills for clients is valuable. These latter skills should not be devalued in relation to the skills which are required to be exercised as part of participation in formal institutional settings, processes and procedures. Nonetheless, it is a major finding of this study that sharing 'vernacular' literacy skill relies on key mentors and 'trusted brokers' whose skills may still not be absolutely reliable nor their information current. Brokers are trusted in their communities because of social capital considerations, like their status in networks, and their level of responsibility undertaken in various community activities. But where demonstrated literacy skills are the sole factor under consideration, to an individual with no or extremely minimal skills, anybody with greater skills looks disproportionately more equipped to deal with daily living.

In addition, where 'trusted brokers' have status and seniority with ethnic or indigenous communities which are in addition to their

(mis?)perceived higher literacy skills, they offer these skills in a value laden context. Their talents are always mediated by ethical, cultural and broader educational concerns and experience. Whilst not seeking to argue against these considerations having immense value in interpersonal transactions, in some circumstances, these overlaid cultural factors can mitigate the benefit which the brokers' higher literacy skills might otherwise promise. The lesser skilled recipient of the mentor's ability still needs a minimal level of 'institutional' proficiency in areas like critical discourse analysis, in order to separate out the context of information transfer, as well as the usefulness, currency and reliability of the information which is offered by the 'broker'.

Meeting literacy need by building on the 'vernacular'

This study reveals that 'vernacular' literacy skill relates largely to identification with the community, within networks both small and large, networks which are cultural and recreational as much as socio-economic and specifically focused on learning. Within them, literacy provision is well suited to remaining within community contexts, and provision is well served by good adult education pedagogy and materials. This is regardless of whether the provider is a private one, a not for profit community group, or a TAFE or school service as the public provider. The practices and curricula of good community programs should be drawn from adult education pedagogy of the highest order of practice and utilising materials which are suitable to users of habitual 'vernacular' literacy. The principle of offering educational opportunities over a whole lifetime is also an important aspect of building individual skill and community capacity.

It is from within the contexts described in this study's selected community that incipient social capital is formed and developed in local areas to make them more proactive in meeting their individual and collective futures. In this city, there is undoubtedly a strong community infrastructure which is lively and quite capable of further development. However it is by no means exhaustively explored, developed or exploited, and the siting of literacy programs within community contexts is one way of undertaking the enhancement of social capital to achieve transformative change in this population. Additionally, it may provide a model for other similarly disadvantaged communities in other urban or semi-regional settings.

Furthermore, venues in which programs are delivered need to take cognisance of the special needs of some particular cohorts of low skilled clients, e.g. young people in alternative school settings and/or programs after failure with conventional high schooling, long term unemployed people, middle-aged workers, but particularly men retrenched from low skilled manual employment, persons with disabilities, recent migrants and refugees who have been subjected to repression by the state in their countries of origin. These special needs make them more prone to experiencing, anticipating or perpetuating failure in institutional settings, sometimes to an extent where they will not even try to access education or training.

Lifelong learning can be given power as practice, rather than as mere usage of the rhetoric, if settings and programs actually enhance the possibilities of successful interactions and outcomes in learning activities by community participants. The prospect of successful literacy practice and use can be further enhanced by a systematic program to augment the skills of 'trusted brokers'. It is anticipated that this would comprise just enough 'institutional' literacy skills to enable their critical appraisal and fulfillment of the literacy requirements of bureaucratic tasks and procedures.

Appreciating the social capital value of the brokers' 'vernacular' discourses and the role that they can play in social cohesion, advocacy and proactive community development can become a form of safeguard against simply transferring them to a disguised form of 'hard core' 'institutional' literacy. This transference may be counter-productive, as they would become removed from the life and language of the community of other 'vernacular' users. The brokers have been trusted by their cohort in the first instance because of their skills within their primarily social role of leadership and advocacy in the group. Focus on developing their critical literacy skills would ensure some consistency and currency in their literacy practices so that they were equally well trusted for this literacy leadership role as well.

9 Implications for policy

The community continues to sustain a loss of unemployment services, increasing unemployment, an uncertain industrial and manufacturing employment base, and limited training opportunities in the local context. These features of the economic potential of the community are co-existing with a political/funding climate of heavy focus on employment related outcomes. These are disadvantaged communities where unemployment, particularly for young people, is very high and likely to remain so in the face of a very precarious employment base, and where a population skew indicates a large number of people not in the workforce at all, nor likely to be there, because of welfare dependency. In these communities, lifelong learning is as much about building community capacity and skills for daily living as it is about securing a job, even with higher literacy skills gained by participants.

Thus at a policy level, it could be argued that there needs to be an integrated approach at all levels to the whole client and the whole community, including its service providers, rather than an ad hoc crisis managerial approach to the different elements which constitute disadvantage.

Secondly, that government funding programs reflect this integration and that planning for social and physical infrastructure coexists as part of this inclusive approach. Thirdly, that the crucial nexus between literacy and numeracy training and increasing employment levels in current funding programs be challenged on a plane beyond a primary focus on placement into employment, to a focus on a proactive community development model, and more community generated lifelong learning. Coincidentally, this model may still offer employment opportunities where appropriate, after some basic adult education for living skills and reduced dependency on welfare relief has taken place for all disadvantaged clients.

Where proactive formal educational policy is concerned, it could be argued that literacy and numeracy programs and materials need to be reflective of hands-on community participation and community capacity building over an individual and/or the community's lifetime, rather than a simple issue of access, predominantly centred on the single measurable outcome of a job for the low skilled client. Finally, community literacy brokers who have a position of 'natural' leadership within their communities should be actively assisted to maintain the currency and

accuracy of the skills and knowledge which they impart to other less skilled community individuals. Human service clients who lack the necessary critical skills to reflectively assess everyday literacy tasks should be assisted to develop skills that enable them to access relevant information from literacy brokers in their communities.

10 Implications for practice

The implications for practice are strongly related to the policy issues and considerations. These relate chiefly to development of education and training methodologies and pedagogies which accentuate the need for a holistic approach to the whole client, rather than an ad hoc treatment of aspects of the clients' elements of disadvantage. Clearly, developing good practice highlights the need for a coordinated and integrated approach to service provision across problem areas. It also emphasises the need for a coordinated and integrated funding approach by governments and statutory bodies in response to service provision, and for integrated social planning to coexist with infrastructure support services.

Developing programs and pedagogy for this disadvantaged client group also indicates that there is a need for pre-vocational literacy and numeracy programs, not related to employment outcomes alone but, through an holistic approach, to community development in integrated programs. Often unfunded programs, sometimes based upon purely voluntary effort, can work best in literacy and numeracy provision where they are based on demonstrable local need and use skilled human resources in management and committed teaching personnel. There is a need to innovate new programs under these criteria, and give them workable and realistic amounts of funding under some wholly new funding regime, so that they are able to forward plan and continue in an ongoing manner, rather than as the ubiquitous, short lived and ineffective 'pilot project'.

11 Implications for further research

Other themes which emerged but still need to be more closely analysed in follow-up research include researching other areas of similar disadvantage for comparative purposes or communities not matched for economic disadvantage but examined for best practice examples of strategies and programs which are effective in communities. The other follow-up research of major import would be examining other communities' ways of identifying positive models of local, integrated service delivery.

12 Conclusion

This project has determined the significance of literacy in the lives of people who depend on the services of various community groups for many of their daily needs. It has demonstrated how literacy, and potentially, literacy education, can contribute to the social distribution of knowledge within communities. In this way, literacy is integral to the development of social capital that, in turn, enables communities to be adaptive, responsive to change and able to plan for their futures. Literacy viewed in this way allows lifelong learning to become a tangible possibility for addressing social exclusion, by opening up spaces for ways of learning within communities that develop individual and collective competence.

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Appendix A

Population Demographics of the Logan City Study area

The case study area of the City of L**** was selected because of certain crucial indicators of disadvantage in the local population statistics which literature and the SAL had indicated were particularly salient for research into the connections between literacy, social capital, social transformation and community development, and lifelong learning.

The population of L**** City has increased dramatically since its inception in 1966. The annual average growth rates from 1966-1976 were extremely high at 18.56% declining to 2.31% between 1991 and 1996. This trend is likely to continue as land resources for further residential development becomes more limited.

In 1996 the Central District (see Appendix A: L**** City District Map [ABS]) had the largest population with 44,098 people and the East District the smallest with 27,782 persons. The West District had the highest annual population growth rate at 6.06% between 1991 and 1996. The Central and North Districts which are the older built up areas of L**** City, have had small population declines due to reductions in household sizes and limited land available for residential development. The total City population in 1996 was 162,665 persons housed in approximately 65,000 rateable dwellings. Projections estimated that around 17,329 households would be formed in L**** City between 1996 and 2006. The South and West Districts are projected to accommodate around 67% of this projected growth.

Family types

In 1998, L**** City was very much a city of young families. In 1996, L**** City had a higher proportion of couples with children (44.44%) than the Brisbane Statistical District (BSD) (35.73%) and Queensland (34.94%). L**** also had a higher proportion of lone person households (24.72%) compared to the BSD (21.65%) and Queensland (21.65%) Since 1998, the proportion of couples with children has decreased by 21%; lone person households have increased by 11% and one parent families have risen by 7.5%. The statistics for Queensland, however, have changed very little in this time.

Age profile

In 1996, L**** City had higher proportions of people in all age groups up to 19 years and for age groups 29-49 years compared to the BSD and Queensland. L****City correspondingly had lower proportions of people in all age groups over 50 years compared to the BSD and Queensland. The current age/sex profile of L**** City indicates a need for facilities and services for children and young families, such as educational facilities, child care services, sport and recreational facilities. The profile also includes a future need for employment, new housing and higher education facilities as children grow and leave home to study, to work and to establish households of their own.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI)

3,180 ATSI people were recorded in the 1996 Census as residents of L****, although community workers believe these figures to be significantly understated. This is a lower proportion of the L**** population (1.6%) than for the whole of Queensland because of the statistically high proportion who live in North Queensland.

The proportion of ATSI residents under 20 years (55.4%) is statistically higher compared to the ATSI populations of the Brisbane ATSIC Region (51.48%) and Queensland (50.71%). The proportion aged 60 years and over (1.95%) is also lower than the Brisbane ATSIC region (3.44%) and Queensland (4.22%).

Ethnicity and overseas settlement

In L**** in 1996, almost three quarters of the population (72.41%) were born in Australia. A further 13.92% were born in English speaking countries. Of the population, 10.16% were born in non–English speaking countries, but no one group constituted more than 1.00% of the population. However, of the 161 countries from which residents were drawn, L**** City had higher proportions of some groups than the BSD. L**** City's total population comprises 10.16% of the BSD total population so any proportion of a national group over 10.16% indicates that L**** has a higher proportion of this national group compared to the BSD as a whole. The groups of particular significance here are people born in Western Samoa, Tonga, Yugoslavia, Boznia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Romania.

Additionally between August 1991 and March 1998, 2,685 overseas settlers in Australia nominated L**** as their destination. They were mainly from Yugoslavia, England, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Fiji.

Housing: the nature of occupancy

In 1996, L**** City had about the same proportion of dwellings which were "being purchased" (64.96%) as the BSD (66.78%) and Queensland (64.96%). However L**** has a significantly lower proportion which were "fully owned" (27.12%) compared to the BSD (37.65%) and Queensland (39.12%). This reflects the younger community in L****with many people still paying off their homes. The proportion of homes being rented in L**** (31.96%) is about the same as the BSD (29.56%) and Queensland (30.29%). Caravans, cabins or houseboats comprised about 1.5% of dwellings and 0.77% of people were living in them in 1996. Local research in 1996 also revealed that there were 989 caravan sites, on site vans cabins and relocatable homes in caravan parks in L****.

However L**** had a significantly higher proportion of public housing (7.12%) compared to the BSD (4.87%) and Queensland (3.95%). Public housing stock has increased from 3,428 in 1991 to 4,020 in 1997. The Central and South Districts had most of the public housing with more than 80% of L****'s total public housing stock.

Affordability of housing in L**** is related to the supply and demand for housing and land. The home and unit prices are reported to have varied very little over the period 1991-6. REIQ valuation for 1997-8 indicates current medium price for a single dwelling at $105,500 and at $93,000 for a unit townhouse. This is a return to property values as at 1992/3.

Income, household and individual

In 1996, the poverty line for a 'standard family of two adults and two children in which one adult works' was $418 per week. L**** had a lower proportion of households earning less than $500 per week (30.25%) compared to the BSD (32.70%) and Queensland (36.06%). L**** (22.88%) had a lower proportion of households earning $1000 per week compared to the BSD (26.12%) but about the same proportion compared to Queensland (22.40%).

In 1996, the poverty line for a single person was $223 per week. A slightly lower proportion of individuals in L**** (45.97%) earned $299 or less than the BSD (46.31%) and Queensland (48.41%). A lower proportion of individuals had weekly incomes of $1000 (2.80%) compared to the BSD (4.88%) and Queensland (4.37%). Women outnumbered men in L**** in all income categories below $399, while men outnumbered women in all income categories above $399 per week. Simply put, this means that unemployed single women are the poorest of all in L****, closely followed by sole parent families living on a single female wage or a single family pension payment.

Industry

The retail trade was the largest employer of L**** residents in 1996, employing 11,400 people or 16.62% of residents. The manufacturing industry (16.62%), the construction industry (9.09%), the property and business services (8.72%) and the wholesale trade (8.84%), were also large employers of L**** residents.

In comparison, the 5 major employers of BSD residents were the retail trade (13.93%), the manufacturing industry (10.51%), health and community services (9.30%), property and business services (9.29%), and education (7.20%). The 5 major employers of Queensland residents were the retail trade (14.15%), the manufacturing industry (10.51%), health and community services (9.30%), property and business services (9.29%), and education (7.20%).

The majority of males were employed in the manufacturing industry, the retail trade, the construction industry, and the wholesale trade. The majority of females was employed in the retail trade, health and community services, the manufacturing industry and property and business services. The number of males in the workforce outnumbered females in all age groups.

Most of the businesses in L**** were registered on the L****lead Business Register, and were small businesses with 0-3 employees (51.89%) and with annual turnovers of less than $500,000. The majority had full time employees (67.24%), and the largest proportion could be called service providers (55.35%), followed by retailers (24.67%).

Employment

At Census time 1996, L**** City had 38,873 jobs, or 6.27% of the total jobs available in the BSD. 68,590 residents were working in these jobs.

The Central and North had the highest proportions of jobs with 29.84% and 25.80% respectively.

L**** had significantly higher proportions of jobs compared to the BSD in

- manufacturing, construction;
- the retail trade;
- the wholesale trade; andeducation.

L**** had significantly lower proportions of jobs in

- transport and storage;
- finance and insurance;
- property and business services;
- government and administration and defence;
- health and community services; and cultural and recreational services.

All the jobs in L**** were not held by residents and, equally, many residents travelled outside L**** to work. There were significantly higher proportions of residents working in:

- transport and storage
- property and business services; and
- government and administration and defence.

And significantly lower proportions of residents working in:

- the retail trade;
- education; and
- health and community services.

Qualifications and employment

In 1996, L**** had a significantly lower proportion of people aged 15 years and over with a degree or diploma (9.49%), compared to the BSD (16.88%) and Queensland (13.75%). Correspondingly, the City had a higher proportion of people in the same age groups with no formal qualifications (64.97%), compared to the BSD (59.56%) and Queensland (61.48%).

Labour force participation

At Census time 1996, the unemployment rate (proportion of persons unemployed to all persons in the labour force) was 10.7%, with the South and Central Districts having significantly higher rates than other Districts. This figure compares with 9.8% Queensland wide.

The figure in March 2000 holds steady at 10.3% for the City overall, however figures for L****lea have been consistently only half the level of L****holme for the entire period from 1996 to March 2000. The pattern of higher unemployment in the South and Central Districts still persists.

Youth unemployment is a serious issue in L****. The official rate for under age 19 years at April 1998 was 27.3% for general unemployment and 31.2% for the full time unemployment rate. The general unemployment rate is 6.5% higher than for Queensland and 6.9% higher than for the whole of Australia. The full time unemployment rate is 2.0% higher than for Queensland and 3.4% higher than for the whole of Australia. (Teenage Regional Labour Force Estimates, DEETYA, April 1998). Local groups, however, estimate that the youth unemployment rate could be closer to 50%.

L**** City has the highest hidden unemployment levels in the state, with a large part time casual labour force in L**** working as little as three to four hours per week. It is hidden because official figures fail to consider the high rate of unemployment among women and NESB and ATSI communities. They also fail to acknowledge underemployment, particularly for youth. People undertake further or longer education because they cannot get a job. They rely upon income support from a part pension, part benefit, spouse or parent, because jobs are unavailable — but only because jobs are unavailable — and do not appear in unemployment figures. This occurs despite high employment growth, relative to some other parts of South East Queensland, because of locational and industry attributes (i.e., cheap land and access to a port). Thus whilst the size of the labour force in L**** has increased, with 9,271 more people employed in 1997 than in 1990, the level of unemployment has also risen by 959. Additionally, more males than females have been unemployed from 1990 to 1996. Over the period, female unemployment has varied between 30% to 50% of persons unemployed; males have varied between 50% to 70% of persons unemployed.

Pensions and benefits

76,234 pensions and benefits were paid by the DSS in L**** City in September 1997, although some individuals may receive more than one kind of payment. The proportion of the population receiving Social

Security payments are as follows:

Age Pensions (7619)	= 4.62%
Disability Support (4770)	= 2.89%
Sole Parent Pension (5240)	= 3.18%
Labour Market Allowances (10,156)	= 6.16%

This table shows that age pensions were mostly paid to people living in the North and Central Districts, which have the older suburbs. This pattern is repeated with other payments. The Central and North Districts combined, the most highly populated districts, have the highest number of aged, disability support, carer and sole parent pensions, as well as the highest number of other payments, notably Newstart Allowance and family and parenting allowances. There appears to be a disproportionately high number of disability pensioners living in L**** City.

Unemployment Services

Until recently, unemployment services were provided through community based and government agencies, and principally funded through DETYA with income support provided through Centrelink. The method of funding having changed, CES (now Employment National), Skillshare and other unemployment service providers have become competitors for tendering for this work.

Unemployment services in L**** which have been reduced or ceased operating altogether over the period 1996–1998 include:

- CES S*****wood — closed Oct 1996;
- Job Skills Program (for the long term unemployed) — ceased Nov 1996;
- Access Inc (W***ridge) — reduced from 37 to 6 staff currently;
- Literacy Unit (special intervention program) — ceased operation;
- Choices Program — youth employment and secondary school support progam — ceased operation
- Job Club — defunded, ceased operation;
- Employment Services Regulatory Authority — Case Management — defunded;
- Job Club S*****wood — defunded, ceased operations;
- Skillshare, S*****wood — ceased operations;
- ITEC — Skillshare info-tech specialist program — funded until 1997 and only operating a small program in 1998 .

DEETYA no longer has a presence in L****in its own right having closed the regional office in W***ridge.

Community education and training facilities

Educational and learning facilities in L**** consist mainly of schools, including pre-schools, a TAFE and a university. There are 27 pre-schools, 26 state and 8 private primary schools, 10 state and 4 private secondary schools, and the L**** State Special School for students aged five to eighteen years.

The L**** Institute of TAFE is located at M*****brook, providing accredited courses in Certificate to Advanced Diploma levels in subject areas like:

Management/information technology;
Construction/engineering;
Horticulture;
Hairdressing;
Childcare;
Further study/access to work;
Language and literacy.

It also offers cyber and Internet related product skills through the Institute's Cyberskills Workshop in S*****wood, and short courses through the Adult Community Education Unit.

Griffith University operates the L**** campus which opened in 1998 and has 2000 enrolments in 2000. Bachelor degree courses focus on flexible learning processes and are designed to meet local needs in:

Management, business and commerce;
Primary education;
Human services :
childcare, rehabilitation, disability, welfare and aged care;
Nursing;
Arts and photography;
Communication;
Information technology;
Science, food science and environmental health.

Elsewhere in L**** training is provided by self-help groups, business academies and the Nanny School, and organisations like Access Inc, Logan ITEC, Group Training Australia. However, for people with disabilities, transport and access barriers to educational services and facilities continue to cause problems e.g. the L**** TAFE is not on the railway line. Other barriers may be language, literacy and numeracy

difficulties for recently arrived migrants and refugees, the costs of transport and childcare, the demands of "mutual obligation" activities, low socio-economic status, low social skills, low self-esteem, parenting responsibilities, cultural and ethnic barriers, and lack of adequate funded programs.

Implications for a population survey in L**** City

The population demographics of the City of L**** in all respects indicate the likelihood that significant groups within L**** are at Levels 1 to 3 on the scales of literacy articulated by the SAL. Even more pertinently, significant groups in the L**** City population are drawn from those sub-sets which share factors of age, educational attainment, income distribution and employment, likely to predispose them to showing both higher characteristics of disadvantage but lower literacy/numeracy skills than the general population of the Brisbane Statistical Division.

For the following reasons, a study of perceptions of literacy need and provision to accommodate and achieve socially transformative change within the L**** City area was recommended and pursued:

Demographically, L**** City is a city of young families, still growing in population and still engaged with the planning and processes of providing education and training for these families for the present and near future.

Educational attainment in L**** City is low, and according to the SAL, is among the most significant factors in pre-determining low literacy outcomes and socio-economic status.

Unemployment in L****, especially for youth, is high, and likely to remain high, and the SAL indicates the strong correlation between low socio-economic status, low income and low literacy skills. Industry in L**** is in retail, construction, manufacturing and wholesale which are vulnerable employment areas in the face of any local or global economic downturn. L**** is under-represented in community services, government administration and education services compared to the BSD and state profiles.

Whilst L**** City does not have a significant ATSI population, its ATSI population is young and underemployed or unemployed. Also, it does have significant pockets of NESB residents and refugee enclaves, a factor which predisposes these groups to disadvantage in becoming literate in English.

Housing affordability is still within the average employed resident's grasp, however the provision of low cost public housing at a rate above the BSD is an indication of continued population growth in a lower income, lower educational attainment sector, which is predisposed to literacy disadvantage.

Hidden unemployment or 'underemployment' in L**** is a significant issue, with a very large number of residents working in part time and casual jobs, or a significant number not participating in the labour market at all because of the receipt of Social Security income. These individuals reflect the characteristics of the SAL component which had both low income and/or little or no labour market participation, coupled with low literacy skills.

Unemployment services in L**** City, including literacy and numeracy, have been materially eroded since 1996, despite labour market deregulation and competitive tendering for these programs. Education, community and health services have not yet been significantly expanded to make transformative change in the community although these processes are currently being initiated. Improving the baseline for literacy/numeracy competence may be one of several ways to attempt some transformative social change at a community level.

Appendix B

Findings of the Adult Literacy Survey (1997)

The Survey of Aspects of Literacy (SAL) was undertaken between May and July of Census year 1996 as a national survey of people aged 15-74 years of age designed to measure some elements of Australians' literacy and numeracy skills. These skills were the information, processing skills necessary to use printed material found at work, at home and in the community.

The SAL objectively measured three types of literacy:

Prose literacy	Prose literacy is the ability to understand and use information from various kinds of prose texts, including newspapers, magazines and brochures. The skills required included locating information in texts, integrating two or more pieces of information and generating information by processing information from the text or by making text-based inferences.
Document literacy	Document literacy is the ability to locate and use information contained in materials such as tables, schedules, charts, graphs and maps. The effective use of documents depends partly on being able to locate information in a variety of displays taking various conditions into account, to integrate information from various parts of the document, to generate information by processing information or by making inferences, and to transfer information from one source to another.
Quantitative literacy	Quantitative literacy is the ability to perform arithmetic operations using numbers contained in printed texts or documents. The effective use of numbers contained in printed material involves being able to locate numbers and extract them from material that may contain similar but irrelevant information, and being able to perform arithmetic operations when the operations to be used must often be inferred. This type of literacy has a strong element of numeracy. However,

> because quantitative literacy relates to the ability to extract and use numbers from printed texts and documents, it is referred to as a type of literacy.

Individuals undertaking the survey were asked to complete formal tasks for a standardised assessment but also to self-assess on their perceptions of their proficiency with the literacy/numeracy tasks. The general findings of the levels of skills as a result of the SAL help to answer the questions of whether Australian's literacy skills are adequate for the challenges placed upon them in daily life, and whether there are any groups in the community which may be disadvantaged by poor literacy skills.

These disadvantaged groups can be aligned against the direct context of the population demographics and characteristics of the residents of L**** City. Likewise, in reverse, their projected likely skills profile can be compared with the characteristics of the SAL.

Skill levels

The SAL did not define literacy in terms of a basic threshold, above or below which a person was either literate or not literate. Rather it defined literacy as a continuum for each of the three types of literacy denoting how well people used material printed in English. Progression along this continuum was characterised by increased ability to process information and to draw correct inferences based on the material being used.

For analytical purposes, the score on the literacy continuum for each type of literacy was divided into five levels. However, it should be noted that because the tasks used to derive literacy ability vary in difficulty, there is a range of abilities even among people within each level.

Level 1 (lowest) to Level 5 (highest)

Level 1

People at this level have very poor skills, and could be expected to experience considerable difficulties in using many of the print materials encountered in daily life. Some people at this level display the ability to locate a single piece of information in a relatively short piece of text, to enter a piece of information onto a document, or to perform simple arithmetic operations using numbers provided. However Level 1 also included those who could not complete such tasks.

Level 2

People at this level could be expected to experience some difficulty in using many of the printed materials encountered in daily life. While they would be able to use some printed material, this would generally be relatively simple, short and clearly structured, or require simple arithmetic operations to be performed on numbers that are easily determined from the source text.

Level 3

This level represents the ability to be able to cope with a varied range of material found in daily life and work. People at this level would not be able to use all printed material with a high level of proficiency, but they would demonstrate the ability to use longer, more complex printed material. They would be able to take conditional information into account, to make inferences, to compare and contrast information, and to extract numbers embedded into complex displays and perform more varied arithmetic operations.

Level 4

People at this level have good literacy skills, and display the ability to use higher order skills associated with matching and integration of information, with making higher order inferences, and with performing arithmetic operations where either the quantities or the operation to be performed are not easily determined.

Level 5

People at this level have very good literacy skills, and can make high level inferences, use complex displays of information, process conditional information and perform multiple operations sequentially.

General skill level distribution

The skill level distribution of people aged 15-74 years was similar on each of the prose, document and quantitative literacy scales. About 2.6 million people had poor skills (Level 1) and could be expected to experience considerable difficulties in using many of the print materials that are encountered in daily life. About 3.6 million were at Level 2, and could be expected to experience some difficulties in using many of the printed materials that may be encountered in daily life. Level 3 was the

largest category, and the skills of the 4.8 million people at this level would enable them to cope with many printed materials found in daily life and work, although not always with a high level of proficiency. Some 2.0 million people were at Level 4 representing good skills, and a relatively small number (300,000) were at Level 5, representing very good skills. People at both Level 4 and 5 are considered capable of managing the literacy demands of daily life.

Table 1: Number and proportion at each skill level

Skill level	Prose scale		Document scale		Quantitative scale	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Level 1	2 607.4	19.7	2 580.3	19.5	2 531.8	19.2
Level 2	3 631.9	27.5	3 738.3	28.3	3 590.8	27.2
Level 3	4 668.9	35.3	4 774.2	36.1	4 764.0	36.0
Level 4	2 052.7	15.5	1880.8	14.2	2011.9	15.2
Level 5	259.9	2.0	247.2	1.9	311.3	2.4
Total	13,220.8	100.0	13 220.8	100.0	13 220.8	100.0

Because Level 5 is a comparatively small group for the purposes of analysis, the SAL combined Levels 4 and 5 in most instances. The results also indicate that although people who were on one level on a particular scale were not on the same level on all three scales, it was generally true that the results indicated that people who had very poor (Level 1) or good (Level 4/5) skills were more likely to be at the same level on all three scales than those at Levels 2 and 3.

Selected socio-demographic characteristics

For the purpose of usefully setting up a series of factors which could be identified as militating literacy levels or varying with selected socio-demographic characteristics of the L**** City population, it was important to identify these factors as they influenced the Survey of Aspects of Literacy. They were identified by extrapolation from the SAL data and compared with household population survey data for the Federal Division of R***** (within which division the entire City of L**** falls geographically) which was conducted by the Census of the same period.

First language English

One characteristic which related most strongly to English literacy skill level was whether English was the first language spoken. Of people who did not peak English as their first language, between 43% on the quantitative scale and 48% on the prose scale were at Level 1, representing approximately 1 million people. In comparison, 14% on each scale were native speakers and at Level 1 (about 1.5 million people), whilst some 18-20% of native speakers were at Level 4/5, compared with 7-8% for those whose first language was not English.

Educational attainment

Educational attainment is another characteristic strongly linked to literacy performance. In general, greater proportions of people with high skill levels had high levels of educational attainment compared with those at lower skill levels. For example, 65% of people at Level 4/5 on a prose scale had a post-school qualification, compared with 22% of people at Level 1.

Age

Younger people tended to have higher literacy levels than older people. Compared with older people, larger proportions of people aged under 45 years had good skill levels, with the exception of people aged 15-19 years. Many 15-19 year olds will not have completed their education, and will have little work experience, and therefore their literacy skills may develop further. The literacy skills of people aged 45 years and over declined with age. Some 41% to 46% of those aged 65-74 years had very poor skills, and three quarters were at Level 1 and 2. This may be related to greater proportions of older people having lower educational attainment levels, and/or the relatively high rates of disabilities (some of which affect literacy skills) among older people.

Gender

The literacy performances of males and females aged 15-19 years were similar on the document scale, but on the prose and quantitative scales, there were some significant, and interesting, differences. On the prose scale, the proportion of females in this age group at Levels 2, 3 and 4/5 consistently exceeded that of males in the same age group (as was the case for prose literacy amongst females in most age groups), with the corollary that the proportion of females with poor skill levels (Level 1)

was half that of males in this age group (10% of females had poor skills compared with 20% of males).

On the quantitative scale however, there were larger proportions of females aged 15-19 years at Levels 1, 2 and 3, and a correspondingly smaller proportion with good to very good skills compared with same aged males (8% of females were at Level 4/5 on the quantitative scale compared with 15% of males). This pattern was repeated with the Level 4/5 male quantitative skill level across all age groups.

On the document scale, the proportions of males and females with good skills were similar for those aged under 45 years, but older males tended to have better document skills than older females. As age increased, the changes with gender also showed interesting variation. For instance, in the 55-74 age group, the proportion of males at Level 4/5 was greater than the proportion of females, possibly due to the (previous) better educational and labour force opportunities for this group. The different results for males and females may reflect to some extent traditional differences in fields of study and employment opportunities for males and females.

Labour force status

There was a clear relationship between literacy skill level and labour force status. Depending on the literacy scale, 11% to 12% of employed people were at Level 1. The corresponding percentages for unemployed people were 30% to 31%, and for those who were not in the labour force, the proportions were even larger.

The proportions at Level 2 in each labour force category were similar, but significantly larger proportions of employed people were at Levels 3 and 4/5, compared with unemployed people and those not in the labour force.

Income

Just 6% of people on Level 1 on the prose scale received an annual income in the highest quintile, compared with 30% of people at Level 4/5. Some 63% of people on Level 1 on the prose scale were on the two lowest income quintiles. The income distributions for Levels 2 and 3 were similar to the distribution for the total population.

The results on the document and quantitative scales were similar, but the proportion of people on Level 4/5 on the quantitative scale who were in the top income quintile was the highest of all scales, at 37%. This

may be because a greater proportion of males were on Level 4/5 on the quantitative scale compared with females, and males tend to have larger incomes.

Indigenous peoples

In a survey marked by both under-representation of rural and remote indigenous communities, and under-reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ethnic status among urban indigenous communities, of those surveyed who identified as ATSI, almost all (98%) reported speaking English as their first language.

Significantly greater proportions of indigenous peoples were at low literacy levels compared with other people who spoke English as their first language, and their skills showed more variation across the three scales. Some 41% were at Level 1 on the prose scale, 45% were at Level 1 on the document scale, and 47% were at Level 1 on the quantitative scale.

Different levels of educational attainment may explain these results to some extent. Some 62% of indigenous peoples did not complete the highest level of secondary school (the corresponding figure for other people whose first language was English was 36%).

Residence by state or territory

Representation in this survey was not complete for the Northern Territory. However, New South Wales and Victoria had the largest proportions for all the states and territories for each scale, whilst the two territories had the smallest proportion at Level 1. The ACT contained the largest proportion at Level 4/5 on each scale. Tasmania and NSW had relatively small proportions at Level 4/5 on each scale.

Some differences can be explained by socio-demographic characteristics of the populations. For example, NSW and Victoria have bigger populations overall, and larger proportions of NESB individuals, whilst Tasmania and Queensland have relatively small proportions. There are also variations in age structures across states and territories.

Objective assessment compared with self-assessment

Survey respondents were asked to rate their own basic reading, writing and mathematical skills in the context of "the needs of daily life". Some interesting discrepancies occurred which can perhaps be explained in terms of individuals' constructions of the term "needs of life", and their access to and usage of 'institutional' literacies.

Self-rating of reading skills and objective assessment of prose literacy

Almost all (92%) of those who rated their reading skills for the needs of daily life as poor were at the lowest level on the prose scale, with negligible proportions at each of the other levels.

Of those who rated their skills for daily life as excellent, 28% were at Levels 1 and 2 on the prose scale. It may seem incongruous that some people who were objectively assessed as having relatively poor literacy skills rated their skills as excellent or good. One possible explanation for this is that people with lower skill levels who had little need to use advanced skills in daily life, may consider their skills good enough to meet the demands placed upon them and, accordingly, rate their skills for the needs of daily life as good, or even excellent.

Self-rating of basic mathematical skills and objective assessment of quantitative skills

Of those who rated their basic mathematical skills for the needs of daily life as poor, 79% were at Level 1 and 15% were at Level 2. This pattern suggests that the relationship between self-rating these skills and objective assessment is not as close as the relationship between self-rated reading and assessed prose literacy, where almost all who assessed as poor were indeed at the lowest skill level.

The other interesting discrepancy which emerges in this area is that, although most of those who rated their skills as good had lower to mid range skills, a significant 12% were at Level 4/5. Of those who rated their mathematical skills as excellent, 44% were at Level 3 and 33% at Level 4/5, but significant proportions were at Levels 1 and 2 (23%). This again raises the perception of the individual as to what skills in mathematics are perceived as "good" or "adequate" "for the needs of daily life", and what the daily needs of life are perceived to be.

APPENDIX C

Generic list of informants to the ALNARC Project 2, 2000: Study January 2001

An officer of the DETIR regional office located in the City, and funding authority for the private providers of community education including literacy programs.

The program/curriculum writer and program delivery officer of a funded pre-vocational literacy program for women, including Aboriginal women, seeking literacy skills for an eventual return to work in the study area.

The manager, a community committee member, and the professional counselling staff of a Women's Health Centre.

The local City Council CEO of the Social Planning Division and a field worker in social programs run both the Council and those run by community groups mentored with Council assistance.

The local Federal Member of Parliament, largely within the geographical area.

The state member of the electorate which was wholly encompassed by the study area.

A focus group of the manager, the trainer, another field worker, a social work student on placement, and seven young people in a social literacy program for young people with a disability, mostly an intellectual disability.

A literacy teacher who was involved part time in Alternative School provision, part time in literacy provision in an Adult Community College and also assessed literacy clients under the local federal government funded Literacy and Numeracy Training program for the long-term unemployed.

The manager, the Migrant Resettlement Officer, the voluntary tutor trainer of the adult literacy program, and a focus group of fourteen clients at a Multicultural Neighbourhood Centre.

39 individuals in total

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